



SOS Digital - Providing Support to Students in Distress

Neurodiversity_Autism Perspective

Self-Help Guide for Staff



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CHALLENGES IN STUDENTS WITH NEURODIVERSITY: HOW TO RESPOND

Relational, communicative and organizational challenges in students with neurodiversity

Some students, with difficulties in interacting with others and an atypical learning style due to neurodiversity condition, are in risk of not completing their university course. They can present diverse difficulties that hinder the management of everyday life independently.

Cognitive aspects:

- ✓ difficulty in concentration and in sustaining attention (e.g. need for frequent interruptions).
- ✓ rigidity of thought, difficulty in learning from mistakes and planning.
- ✓ difficulties in organizing the study (i.e., lack of ability to plan time, space and materials management).
- ✓ tendency to focus on details at the expense of the overall work.
- ✓ tendency to want to understand and complete the task insistently.
- ✓ difficulties to hold up the look (i.e, careless look).

Relational aspects:

- ✓ excessively formal language, generally with few emotional nuances and difficulties in the pragmatics of communication.
- ✓ the content of the speeches concerns "narrow interests", "preferred" areas of knowledge.
- ✓ the difficulty of understanding metaphors, irony, jokes can trigger anxiety and create misunderstandings in social relations.
- ✓ difficulties in the immediate and intuitive understanding of the various social and relational situations.
- ✓ facial expression can be reduced and not modulated, and a few gestures accompany verbal communication.

Academic aspects:

- ✓ difficulties in organizing and postponing exams.
- ✓ difficult relationship with professors, colleagues and consequent isolation (sense of loneliness).

The spectrum of autism includes multiple behaviors and causes. The interaction between genes, aspects of vulnerability of the person and the environment seems to play a relevant role in the manifestation of those signals and symptoms of autism spectrum disorders.

How to approach a student with neurodiversity?

- ✓ maintain a calm and helpful attitude, using clear language (e.g., without allusions).
- ✓ ask him/her if he/she has understood what he/she has been told, as understanding can be hindered by the difficulty of managing the different aspects of the interaction.
- ✓ when discussing the choices to be made in view of examinations or other university life situations, it may be useful to show the different options and consider the possible consequences of each one.
- ✓ allow more time to elaborate the decision that the student may need to take.
- ✓ answer the student's questions in a quiet and safe space.

What to do? How can you help?

- ✓ organize teamwork activities aimed at reinforcing interpersonal and communication skills.
- ✓ prefer clear deliveries, clear roles, assigning a role based on specific competences.
- ✓ if possible, carry out the examination test in a separate environment.
- ✓ allow more time to deliver the task to reduce anxiety, manage attention and difficulty in concentration (e.g., for written tests).

What should not be done in these situations?

- ✓ Avoid general and open questions, ambiguities and implicit questions (e.g., for oral tests)

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ✓ If you are a staff from UMinho please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from UniTrento please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from USC please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from AMU please click [here](#)

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